VLER Scenario - Wounded Warrior Care

The experience of Andrew Smith, a fictional character whose story is based on that of an actual Marine, illustrates how sharing medical information electronically could improve care for our nation's wounded warriors.

At age 16, Andrew Smith received a sports injury that required surgery at a private hospital in his hometown and necessitated continuing care through his private physician.

Two years after a full recovery from his injury, Andrew turned 18 and enlisted in the US Marine Corps. Andrew was scheduled to be sent to Afghanistan and before deployment he had to undergo a pre-deployment health evaluation. This exam reviewed pre-existing conditions like the one he had at 16 that required surgery. The details about this condition were not readily available to Andrew's military doctor, so Andrew had to wait for the hard copy of his old medical records to be faxed or mailed to the military clinic.

Six months into his tour in Afghanistan, Andrew's unit came under attack and Andrew sustained significant wounds. The forward operating medical unit saved his life on the battlefield, but due to significant injury, could not save his arm. Once stabilized, Andrew was transported to an Army Medical Center back in the United States for care. After being medically discharged, Andrew went to the local VA Medical Center for most of his medical needs; however, he was also referred to private physicians in the area to help facilitate his recovery. The VA physicians had electronic access to his DoD medical records, but had no way to electronically share medical information with his private doctors. His private medical facility was using an electronic health records system, but it was incompatible with the systems being used by the VA and DoD. Andrew had to fax or hand-carry some of his medical information between facilities to ensure the doctors had the latest information, which was extremely cumbersome due to his injury.

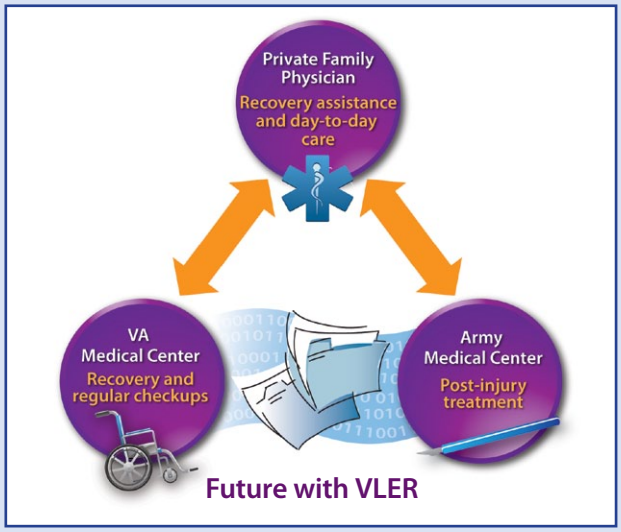
Over many months, Andrew made an incredible recovery, transitioned to civilian life, and enrolled in classes at his local college. Andrew still uses the VA Medical Center when needed, but gets most of his health care through his school's health insurance via his private physician. The issue that still remains for Andrew is that his private doctor does not have access to results of his checkups that are conducted at the VA facilities. The lack of access and information sharing can create unnecessary and/or repetitive treatment by different doctors, as well as the potential for missed diagnoses due to unavailable health information.

How would VLER help Andrew?

In Andrew's case, VLER would support the electronic exchange of prior surgical information; consult requests, and results among his private physician, his military physicians, and his physicians at the VA Medical Center.

VLER would improve his care by providing all of his doctors with the information they need, when they need it, across the federal and private health care organizations that participate in the Nationwide Health Information Network. This timely access to information would enable Andrew's physicians to provide better continuity of care and reduce medical and administrative errors.

In addition, the administrative (personnel and benefits) information that will be exchanged through the VLER initiative would lead to quicker benefits determination decisions and quicker delivery of the benefits due Andrew because of his condition.



Future with VLER

Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER)

What is VLER?

On April 9, 2009, President Barack Obama announced that the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) were working toward the creation of a Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER), intended to provide seamless access to electronic health records for Service Members and Veterans. This effort is a joint DoD and VA initiative that will ultimately enable comprehensive administrative (i.e., personnel and benefits) and medical information for a Service Member or Veteran to be electronically shared with authorized personnel.

When achieved, VLER will result in:

- Better informed clinicians, service providers, and consumers of benefits and care
- Improved continuity and timeliness of service delivery for Service Members, Veterans, and their designees
- Seamless access to personnel, benefits, and medical information from day one of a Service Member's military career through transition to Veteran status and beyond

VLER is being coordinated by the DoD/VA Interagency Program Office (IPO), an organization responsible for oversight and coordination of DoD/VA information-sharing initiatives. VLER builds on previous DoD and VA data sharing initiatives but goes a step further by including private sector organizations (e.g., Kaiser Permanente, Med Virginia) and other federal organizations (e.g., Social Security Administration).

How does VLER work?

VLER will develop a new means to safely exchange data between existing sources of health information, including DoD, VA, other federal agencies, and private sector organizations. VLER is not an acquisition program nor will it result in one single DoD/VA records management system.

VLER will leverage the Nationwide Health Information Network to enable information sharing among DoD, VA, and the private sector health care organizations. VLER will share health information with the strictest and most rigorous standards of privacy and security, so that our Service Members and Veterans can have confidence that their health information will be fully protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Privacy Act.

How is VLER being implemented?

VLER is being implemented iteratively through operational pilots, learning from each pilot to improve the next iteration. To conduct the initial pilot of VLER, DoD joined an existing partnership between VA and private health care provider Kaiser Permanente in San Diego, California. This first pilot phase was conducted in January 2010. The next VLER pilot is in Tidewater, Virginia and expands upon the technology and data used in the first phase. Future pilot sites for VLER are being explored and finalized.

VLER will allow secure and timely access to Service Members' and Veterans' medical records, providing info needed to deliver better continuity of care and reduce medical and administrative errors.

For more information please email **VLERinfo@osd.pentagon.mil** or visit the Office of Personnel and Readiness Information Management Web site, at: **https://www.mpm.osd.mil**